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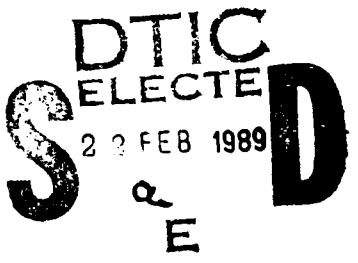
Career Development Models: A Brief Overview of Relevant Theory



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Career Development Models: A Brief Overview of Relevant Theory

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FOREWORD

This literature review provides a concise summary of career development theories that could prove of heuristic value to researchers exploring the career development of active duty military personnel. It was undertaken in preparation for a study of Navy enlisted career development models, which will be addressed in a future report.

This research was funded by the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (FM&P). This review is expected to benefit the civilian and military research communities.

JOHN J. PASS
Director, Personnel Systems Department

SUMMARY

Problem

Although the processes of career decision making, career entry, and career adjustment have received considerable study, much less research has been devoted to the longitudinal effects of selecting a vocation and commencing work. Thus, a constellation of theories has arisen to help explain the career initiation phenomena whereas little theoretical effort has attempted to explain or predict the life events that follow.

Objective

The present literature review surveys those theories that currently influence the thinking of career development workers. Additionally, this review discusses new approaches that may not yet have empirical support but exhibit promise or potential for guiding research.

Approach

The literature related to career development was searched and discussed in terms of focus (e.g., person variables versus environmental variables), ease of implementation, and degree of empirical support.

Results and Conclusions

Several models describing theoretical views of how career development occurs were presented. Of the theories extant, Holland's is most amenable to implementation, followed by the approach of Lofquist and Dawis. Holland's and Super's theories are most supported by empirical data, whereas the theories of Tiedeman, Gottfredson, and Vondracek, Lerner, and Schulenberg have the least such support.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

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Although the processes of career decision making, career entry, and career adjustment have received considerable study, much less research has been devoted to the longitudinal effects of selecting a vocation and commencing work. Thus, a constellation of theories has arisen to help explain the career initiation phenomena whereas little theoretical effort has attempted to explain or predict the life events that follow.

Objective

The present literature review surveys those theories that currently influence the thinking of career development workers. Additionally, this review discusses new approaches that may not yet have empirical support but exhibit promise or potential for guiding research.

Background

Career development has generally been constructed to include both the career decision and entry phase and the career adjustment phase of work life. It has sometimes also been thought to include the process by which employee career progress is enhanced both by the employee and the employer. However, most of the theoretical work dealing with career development has been concerned with the decision making, entry, and adjustment aspects and less with career progress.

Prior to the World War II period, little theorizing was done concerning career decision making and career entry. Most of what was done followed a very empirical line of thought growing out of Frank Parsons' (1909) work done at the beginning of the 20th century. Parsons' view was a simplistic "round pegs, round holes" viewpoint in which primary effort was expended toward the task of identifying an individual's major and most important attributes and matching them with the demands of the world of work. Growing out of this view is the entire aptitude testing movement as well as the interest inventory approach reflected in the work of E. K. Strong and Frederick Kuder.

After World War II, perhaps motivated by both the large technical advances in assessment of people along with the need to aid huge numbers of people in their return to the civilian work force, some writers began to formulate theoretical positions about the process of career decision making, career entry, and career adjustment. Among these writers are Donald Super, Anne Roe, E. Bordin, Eli Ginzberg, and John Holland. Each of these people was instrumental in the presentation of a particular position which hoped to describe the variables associated with career development and its prediction. The work of these theorists, along with others, is described and evaluated in Osipow's (1983) book, Theories of Career Development. The reader interested in a full description of the theories should read the originals, though a shortened version may be found in Osipow's work. The current review will focus only on those theories currently exerting an important influence on the thinking of career development workers as well as several new approaches that, though as yet sparsely studied empirically, may prove to be valuable in our thinking.

APPROACH

The literature related to career development was searched and discussed in terms of focus (e.g., person variable versus environmental variables), ease of implementation, and degree of empirical support.

REVIEW OF MAJOR MODELS

The major current theories of career development include those of Super (1963a, 1963b, 1963c), Holland (1985), the social learning theory approach developed by Mitchell, Jones, and Krumboltz (1979), and the Work Adjustment Theory of Dawis and Lofquist (1984) and Tiedeman and O'Hara (1963). More recent theoretical approaches of interest include that of Gottfredson (1981), Vondracek, Lerner, and Schulenberg (1986), and the decision making theory developed by Harren (see Buck & Daniels, 1985). Other theories such as Roe's (1957) psychoanalytic theory (see Bordin, Nachmann, & Segal, 1963; Ginzberg, 1952), will not be covered since the empirical results have failed to provide a substantial amount of support for any of these theories.

Super's Theory

Super's theory is an outgrowth of his long-term study of the career development of a group of ninth grade boys begun in the early 1950s. This longitudinal study followed a cohort of boys from Middletown, New York for more than 25 years. The results of this study are the major data base upon which Super has based his theory of career development.

Super's theory has two major ingredients. First is the notion that individuals are motivated to implement their self-concept in their work. Second, lifestages influence the vocational developmental tasks that individuals must master in order to achieve career maturity. These two constructs are seen to interact with each other so that while the life cycle changes the particulars of one's vocational behaviors or tasks the self-concept is generally stable, lending continuity to the process and the individual's vocational behavior.

Super's approach assumes that while individual differences exist, each person has the potential for vocational success and satisfaction in a variety of career areas. At the same time, occupations are seen to differ in their requirements and can, thus, tolerate a variety of types of individuals. The resulting choice and adjustment behaviors reflect a continuous process in which career patterns are seen to be a function of socioeconomic status, personality, aptitudes, and opportunities. The major life stages, each with a detailed set of vocational developmental tasks, are a growth stage to about early adolescence, then an exploration stage sub-divided into tentative, transition, and trial substages, an establishment stage, an advancement and maintenance stage, and finally, a stage of decline.

Overall, the results of a large number of studies dealing with the major tenets of Super's theory indicate support for the utility of the notion of self-concept implementation in career choice and adjustment (although investigating that idea is methodologically difficult) and also support for the general theory represented by the stages suggested by Super. Several instruments have been developed to assess career maturity, such as the Career Maturity Inventory and the Career Development Inventory. The existence of these measures has made it possible to both test the stage concept as well as to describe it in

greater detail. A summary of the research literature dealing with Super's theory has been presented in Osipow (1983).

Several other theories seem to be offshoots of Super's work, though major theories in themselves. Tiedeman and O'Hara (1963) proposed a theory that emphasizes the process of discontinuity in life and relates that to career differentiation and integration. Their view sees career development as a continuously differentiating ego identity process, which is triggered both internally through maturation as well as externally through situational changes. Personal differentiation is seen to accompany career development. The integration phase consists of the individual pulling together old differentiations in new ways, thus reaching new closures. This process of integration/differentiation is continuous and somewhat like an individual's striving to maintain biological homeostasis. The individual finds him or herself in a decision requiring situation, which initiates the process. The process goes through phases of exploration, crystallization, choice, clarification, induction, reformation, and integration. The process is continuous and cyclical, so that no end point is ever reached, though decisions continue to be made and revised.

Harren's model (see Buck & Daniels, 1985) is an operational version of the Tiedeman theory. In this approach the decision making process is seen to consist of awareness, planning, commitment, and implementation, while giving considerable emphasis to the characteristics of the decision maker in terms of self-concept, psychological states, and decision making styles.

A new developmental theory has been proposed by Gottfredson (1981). This theory views career development in terms of the process by which occupational aspirations are circumscribed and compromises result. Important variables here are self concept defined in terms of gender, social class, intelligence, and interests and values; also important are occupational images, which convey information about appropriate sex types, prestige levels, and field of activity. Out of these experiences, individuals develop self-perceptions related to perceived job compatibility as well as differential perceptions of the accessibility of various occupations in terms of opportunities and barriers. A range of acceptable alternatives is generated. Eventually, in response to a social stimulus to name an occupation as a goal, the individual expresses an occupational aspiration. This occupational aspiration reflects the compromises individuals have made in terms of limitations of themselves as well as their occupational perceptions and resulting views of accessibility.

The last of the new developmental theories was proposed by Vondracek, Lerner, and Schulenberg (1986). These writers, critical of the usual approach to development that career theories have taken, proposed first, that people possess the potential for plasticity in that context as well as people change over time (within constraints). However, the life stages are linked and these links mean that earlier events impose constraints on later events. Simply stated, they are asserting that with development the range of alternatives to the realistically considered diminishes, though considerable potential for wide choice remains. Secondly, they assert that people produce their own environments. For example, people who prefer structure will move toward different settings than people who prefer openness. Their model is a "goodness of fit" model of person context relations in which the important variables lie in the family of origin, the extra family network, the family of adult procreation, and the extra adult family network. Peers, organizations such as schools and work settings, and interpersonal relations shape the impact of these primary settings on work behavior.

Holland's Theory

Holland began work on his theory in the 1950s first as a context in which to study personality. He soon realized that the personality typologies he had devised represented variables of considerable significance in understanding how and why people choose their vocation as well as the manner in which their career lives unfold. Over the years since Holland's first formulation, the theory has evolved reflecting the feedback resulting from empirical research designed to test the theory's adequacy. Holland's most recent presentation of the theory is reported in his 1985 monograph.

Simply stated, Holland proposes that the world of work can be classified into six fields:

1. Realistic involves manipulation of objects, tools, machines, and animals. Encourages approaching the world in a tangible, concrete manner.

2. Investigative involves observation and the systematic investigation of the physical, biological, and cultural world.

3. Artistic encourages ambiguous, free, unsystematized activities and competencies in creating art forms and products.

4. Social involves the manipulation of others to inform, train, develop, cure, or enlighten them.

5. Enterprising involves the manipulation of others to attain organizational goals of self-interest.

6. Conventional involves the explicit, systematic, and ordered manipulation of data such as keeping records, filing, and operating business and data processing machines.

Holland also presumes that the world is made up of six types of people who have qualities that are like those of the six environments just described. The theory asserts that people will select careers that correspond to their type.

Not only will people select congruent careers, but their behavior in their work will be influenced by the correspondence between their type and the environment they enter. In sum, people are presumed to seek work environments that match their type in terms of skills required, abilities, attitudes, values, and roles. They seek to locate work in environments populated by others like themselves. Their adjustment is seen to be a product of the interaction between their personality and environment.

Several major variables in Holland's theory include consistency, differentiation, identity, and congruence. Consistency refers to the degree to which different pairs of types are related to one another. Holland views the types and the environments to be related to one another in a hexagonal fashion as shown in Figure 1.

Some pairs of types are physically closer to each other than other pairs. The closer the types the more commonality they share with regard to personal qualities. The similarity reflects the degree of consistency. R and I are more similar to each other than are R and S. Since Holland's system classifies people into their three most dominant subtypes, the consistency of the first two or three types in a person's makeup is important. Since R and I are more consistent than R and S, for example, we would predict that the RI would behave more predictably than the RS person. Consistent people are seen to be more predictable than inconsistent people.

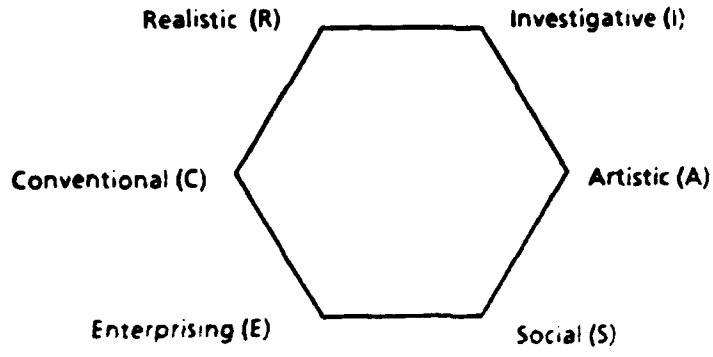

Figure 1. A schematic representation of Holland's typology.

Differentiation reflects the degree to which a type of corresponding environment is clearly defined. It is measured by the degree of difference between the individual's *highest type and lowest type scores.* Differentiation is also related to behavioral predictability. Holland hypothesizes that differentiated people in differentiated environments are more predictable than undifferentiated people in undifferentiated environments.

Identity refers to the clarity and stability of a person with regard to goals, interests, and talents. Environments with high identity have *limited, consistent, and explicit goals* while diffuse environments have many conflicting and poorly defined goals. Environments in some occupations have diffuse identities, which may be part of the reason why people have trouble choosing occupations and adjusting to them. Usually, high identity is correlated with a simple environmental structure and a small organization. The Navy would be a low identity organization in some ways because it is such a large organization, but since individuals operate in specific jobs and job environments, the Navy presents an organizationally complicated picture as far as identity is concerned. As a result, identity is a potentially important variable in understanding Navy enlisted career patterns.

Congruence reports the match between the person's type and the chosen environment. If the first three letters of the individual's type are a good match with the first three letters of the organization, high congruence is said to exist.

Research results, summarized in Holland (1985), Osipow (1983), and Spokane (1985) generally indicate a high degree of support for the validity of Holland's theory, though many specific hypotheses remain to be tested. Holland has aided the investigator who wishes to test his theory by providing three well tested instruments to measure his major constructs.

Social Learning Approaches

As noted previously, the principal proponent of this view is Krumboltz (Mitchell, Jones, & Krumboltz, 1979). The view is taken that career development is the result of an interaction of genetic factors, environmental factors, learning histories, cognitive emotional responses, and performance skills. Each decision point permits the decider to choose from among two or more options. Personal and environmental factors shape the nature, number, and timing of these options as well as the individual's response to them.

Four major influences on the process are (1) genetic endowment, defined in terms of variables such as race, sex, physical appearance, intelligence, health, special abilities, etc.; (2) environmental conditions, including social, political, economic, cultural forces, as well as natural events; (3) learning experiences, defined two ways: instrumental learning experiences where the individual acts on the environment, and associative learning experiences where the individual responds to stimula; and (4) task approach skills. These are the skills, standards, values, work habits, cognitive processes, etc. that each individual brings to the work task.

The assumptions are integrated by several sets of propositions that describe the circumstances under which preferences, cognitive, performance, and emotional responses are shaped and implemented. The factors that effect these developments are largely seen to be influenced by models and reinforcement of appropriate behaviors.

Social learning views occupational development as a complex, lifelong process involving individual decision making as well as social forces. Career indecision is seen to result from unsatisfactory or insufficient learning experiences. The emphasis of the social learning approach is on the process of career decision making, not the content. Thus, emphasis would be placed on aiding the individual to learn the mechanics and process of good decision making in order that it can be applied at any point in life when an important decision must be made.

Little direct empirical literature exists to indicate the validity of this approach though some confirmatory research has been done that predates the existence of the formal theoretical statement (see Mitchell, Jones, & Krumboltz, 1979; and Osipow, 1983 for a summary of this research).

Work Adjustment Theory

In their trait-oriented personality approach, Davis and Lofquist (1984) Lofquist and Davis (1969) assumed that:

1. There is a correspondence between the individual and the environment that each person strives to achieve and maintain. This correspondence can be described in terms of how the individual fulfills the requirements of the work environment and how well the work environment fulfills the individual's requirements.

2. Work adjustment, the outcome of the process of working to achieve correspondence, is continuous, dynamic, and is reflected in job tenure.

3. Satisfaction and satisfactoriness reflect the correspondence between the individual and the environment.

4. The work-personality/work-correspondence correlation can be used to predict occupational satisfaction and satisfactoriness.

The theory builds on the assumption that a hierarchy of skills, skills dimensions, abilities dimensions, and needs exists. This hierarchy determines the potential each person has for the available skills needed to perform satisfactorily in a work environment. In addition, needs are seen as the individual's requirements for a reinforcement of a given strength. Need dimensions are formed and become increasingly stable because most people are in stable environments as they age. Through the differential reinforcement of needs and abilities dimensions from the time of birth on, something called a work personality develops. Work personality partly defines the work environments likely to be of potential satisfaction. In addition, work personality also affects other work styles such as celerity, pace, rhythm, and endurance.

Lofquist and Dawis have developed a battery of tests and/or procedures to measure satisfaction, needs, and satisfactoriness. One product of this effort has been the publication of the Atlas of Reinforcer Patterns, which can be used to describe the potential needs satisfied by various occupations. Theoretically, these profiles can be matched to individual profiles and enhance the prediction of occupational satisfaction.

Empirical research is somewhat limited, though supportive, and is summarized both in Dawis and Lofquist (1984) and Osipow (1983).

A Taxonomy of Adult Career Development Problems

Campbell, Cellini, Shaltry, Long, Pinkos, and Crites (1979) developed a way to identify and classify the range of problems adults encounter in their work lives. This taxonomy has considerable potential to further our understanding of how careers develop, what events are involved in their occasionally going awry, and for developing interventions to remedy career dysfunction.

The taxonomy is based on a set of career developmental tasks that may prove difficult for some or all individuals to master from time to time. The taxonomy consists of four major categories, each of which is further subdivided into two categories. These include problems in (1) career decision making, (2) implementing career plans, (3) organization/institutional performance, and (4) organizational/institutional adaptation.

To use the third category, problems in organization/institutional performance, as an example, it would be subdivided as shown below:

3.1 Deficiencies in skills, abilities, and knowledge:

A. Insufficient skills, abilities, and/or knowledge upon position entry.

B. Deterioration of skills, abilities, and/or knowledge over time . . . due to . . . leave or lack of continual practice of the skill.

C. Failure to modify or update skills.

3.2 Personal factors:

A. Personality characteristics discrepant with the job.

B. Debilitating physical and/or emotional disorders.

C. Adverse off-the-job personal circumstances.

D. Occurrence of interpersonal conflicts on-the-job.

3.3 Conditions of the organizational/institutional environment:

A. Ambiguous or inappropriate job requirements.

B. Deficiencies in the operational structure of the organization.

C. Inadequate support facilities.

D. Insufficient reward system.

Each of the statements above lends itself to highly specific assessment and potentially to intervention. In addition, each of the three job problem areas not shown in detail lends itself to similar analysis and detail. It is obvious that this taxonomy is based on the developmental model and is in certain aspects a model (albeit one that has gone off track) of career development.

CONCLUSIONS

Several models describing theoretical views of how career development occurs were presented. Most of the models place emphasis on how the person and his or her environment mesh with one another, apparently assuming that the better the match the more productive, stable, and satisfied the individual. The theories vary in the particulars of the variables they emphasize, some focusing on personality and self concept variables, others on typologies and environmental variables. Some theories are primarily concerned with the content of the choice, others more with the process of decision making and adaptation, and still others with some more equal combination of the two.

The theories vary with respect to their ease of operational implementation. Because of the instrumentation available, Holland's work is the most easily implemented, followed by the Lofquist and Dawis approach. Least operational is Tiedeman's work.

Finally, the theories vary with respect to the degree to which they have been subjected to empirical test and the degree to which the result shave been supportive of the models. Holland's and Super's theories have the most support, followed by Dawis and Lofquist. Least evidence exists for the Tiedeman and O'Hara; Gottfredson; and Vondracek, Lerner, and Schulenberg theories.

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